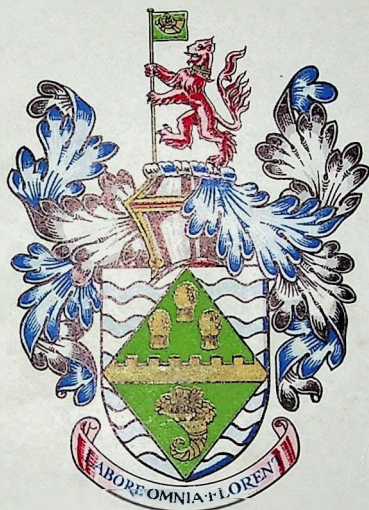


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HUNTINGDON

County Handbook

1963-64



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HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The County Handbook



ISSUED WITH THE APPROVAL
OF THE
HUNTINGDONSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL



SECOND EDITION
1963-64

EDITED AND EXTENDED BY
PHILIP G. M. DICKINSON
F.S.A., F.R.HIST.S., F.R.G.S.
COUNTY ARCHIVIST



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Foreword

by the Rt. Hon. the Lord De Ramsey
Her Majesty's Lieutenant for the County of Huntingdon

HUNTINGDONSHIRE, one of the smaller counties in England, has never been industrialised except in the north-east corner near Peterborough. The Northamptonshire Heights tail off towards the Wash in the western part of the county where nearly every village church has a fine spire marking its position like a pin on a relief map. In the centre and south the towns of Huntingdon, St. Ives and St. Neots have fine Georgian squares. Cobbett says of the county town, "but, Huntingdon is a very clean and nice place, contains many elegant houses, and the environs are beautiful. Above and below the bridge, under which the Ouse flows, are the most beautiful, and by far the most beautiful, meadows that I ever saw in my life."

The River Ouse, flowing through the county on its lazy way from the Midlands to the Wash, divides Huntingdon and Godmanchester and in turn its pleasures are divided between boaters and fishermen, for both of whom it is perfect.

There are relatively few great houses, but Kimbolton Castle, perhaps one of the finest examples of the work of Vanbrugh, is as full of history as anyone could wish. There is also Elton Hall with its beautiful collection of pictures and *objets d'art*; Hinchingsbrooke with memories of Pepys, King James and Cromwell.

The eastern side of the county dips into the Fens, that rich delta of many rivers, on the shores of which is Ramsey, once one of the largest medieval monasteries in England.

I commend this handbook to residents and visitors alike who wish to know more about our county. The information is necessarily condensed but fuller particulars will be found in the Official Guides published by the ten District Councils which go to form the county.



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HUNTINGDONSHIRE

Part One

About the County

HUNTINGDONSHIRE lies on the north-western boundary of East Anglia astride the Great North Road, A1, and the London-Edinburgh main railway line : sixty-two miles from London and one hour by train. The county covers 233,985 acres of which two-thirds are undulating and wooded clay uplands rising to 257 feet in the west, sloping to the meadow pastures of the beautiful valleys of the rivers Great Ouse and Nene and their tributaries, and one-third in the north-east is rich reclaimed and intensively cultivated fen with its characteristic wide and treeless horizon.

Fundamentally, the county has always been concerned with agriculture ; the traditional architecture has made use of local materials with the yellow brick and tiles in the south, and the mellow limestone and Collyweston tiles north of Stilton : together with reed and straw thatch. The villages are seldom grouped around a green but frequently centred on a clock tower or the parish church and spire. In the country houses and farmsteads there are fine examples of Elizabethan and of Georgian building—Toseland Hall to Kimbolton Castle with its Vanbrugh facade and internal murals by Peligrini. Katherine of Aragon died at Kimbolton, but it has been almost transformed since. The towns are Georgian, with picturesque market squares and river bridges.

In Roman times the area was crossed by many roads including the famous Ermine Street. Settlements existed either side of the river at Godmanchester and what may be the most extensive Roman industrial remains in the country have yet to be fully explored between Chesterton and Wansford.

In the 7th century Huntingdonshire was one of the original thirty-two Anglo-Saxon counties and by 1066 it was established with an Earl, Sheriff and Shire Court. The people of Huntingdonshire are of Anglo-Saxon origin and have played an important part in the history of England. King Canute is reputed to have lived at Ramsey. The place where Oliver Cromwell was born and the school where he was educated can be seen in Huntingdon today ; Samuel Pepys (Brampton), Nicholas Ferrar (Little Gidding), William Cowper (Huntingdon), and Capability Brown (Fenstanton) were in their time residents of the county.

Today the population is 85,520. Agriculture, as the primary form of employment, has been supplemented by the extractive industries of brick-clay in the north at Fletton which now produce over 600,000,000 bricks per annum, and of high quality sand and gravel in the Ouse Valley with an annual output of 5/600,000 cubic yards.

During World War II, the county provided a deck from which the air war was carried into Germany and twelve Service airfields were established of which three remain active permanent bases. At that time and after, industries, including light engineering, electronics, plastics, specialised

paper and gravel products, have added a diversity of production to the already established industries connected with agriculture such as canning (Fletton and Huntingdon), sugar beet (Woodston) and chicory processing (St. Ives), and the manufacture of mechanical implements.

Until 1947 there was no marked change in the steady increase in population by natural causes and migration. Since then, there has been a distinct increase in the tempo of development, which has been accelerated by artificially stimulated expansion schemes under the Town Development Act, 1952, designed to relieve overcrowding in London. The expansion of Huntingdon was commenced in 1960, and was followed by St. Neots. Looking forward in the next fifteen years the velocity of expansion will grow and, as forecast in the County Development Plan, the population will exceed 109,000.

The high potential for development is largely due to the excellent radial communications by rail and road to London, the Midlands, the North and East Anglia. The great north railway line through St. Neots and Huntingdon will be the first in the region to be electrified, increasing the frequency of services. Within the county itself the greatest contribution has been made to the improvement of the Great North Road A1, where twenty-four miles of conversion to dual carriageways have been completed in the past few years, and the remaining four is either under construction or shortly to be commenced.

The County Council and its work

The growth of the county in relatively recent times and the anticipated surge of development in the near future in terms of people, families and homes, places in which to work and play, create problems the solution of which is the responsibility of the county authorities ; the County Council and the Borough, Urban and Rural District Councils.

The centre of county administration is in Huntingdon, which is easily accessible from all parts of the area. This accessibility encourages frequent personal contacts, both from the point of view of the elected representatives of the public serving on the County Council and that of the public themselves who have business at the County offices—an intimate relationship which is not found in larger units where individuality is lost and the administration is remote. This applies to all the country services and is particularly apparent, for example, in town and country planning where the county size assists the easy and rapid dissemination of planning policy and requirements to potential developers, which leads to mutual understanding and good relations with the public and other authorities in the area.

Apart from the county town itself which is the hub of county administration, the towns are neighbouring Godmanchester and St. Neots, St. Ives, Ramsey and Old Fletton which form a semi-circle round the perimeter of the county. Rather more than half the population of the county is contained in these towns which makes them ideal centres for the provision of county services catering for their own needs and their surrounding country areas and they include—secondary schools,

health clinics, welfare homes, children's homes, fire stations and district branch libraries. Except from the western corner of the county, no one has to travel more than eight miles to reach one of the centres.

The County Council carries out its functions through committees, each of which is responsible for a particular service ; for many years every committee has been actively engaged in improving existing services and providing new services at the right time and in the right place for the rapidly increasing population. The forecast of development in each area is assessed by the County Planning Committee and co-ordinated through the County Development Plan so that the country remains country, town and village are convenient entities, look well, and are worth living in ; and that the main roads allow traffic to move swiftly and safely.

As the motorist drives northward along the Great North Road past the village of Sawtry which, like many Huntingdonshire villages has retained its intimacy because it sits just off the main road instead of astride it, he may notice roadside signs indicating sections of experimental road. This is one of the largest experiments ever to be undertaken in this country at the request of and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Transport and Road Research Laboratory ; the information on road construction and road surfaces which will be provided from the numerous instruments incorporated in the experiments will make a significant contribution to the knowledge of the engineers who will be engaged on the construction of future motor roads. The Roads and Bridges Committee are justly proud of their achievements and in particular the high standard of road surfaces all over the county which has resulted from a continuous policy begun over twenty-five years ago. The Committee is not unmindful of the preservation of some of the beautiful bridges in the county and has made plans for the 14th-century and 15th-century Ouse river bridges at Huntingdon and St. Ives to be by-passed.

The Welfare Committee made an early start in scrapping its public assistance institutions and replacing them by small homes for old people. The programme for the relinquishing of old type premises was completed in May, 1960, when the largest of the new homes, providing accommodation for 60, was completed in Huntingdon ; by comparison the County is in the top flight of authorities in providing beds per thousand of the population and only five Counties provide more.

The Children's Committee has also been actively engaged in reducing the size of the children's homes and in 1958 opened the first of its " family group " homes. This provides the nearest equivalent to real home life as only six children are accommodated. Plans are in hand to build two more homes of this type. Wherever possible the committee prefer to board out the children who come into their care with foster parents, thus providing a real home atmosphere, so beneficial for the children. Suitable foster mothers are always being sought and an excellent response is found. Many more children are able to be placed with foster parents in this county than in the majority of counties.

There is among the residents of the county a voluntary spirit which is remarkably refreshing to those who are in intimate contact with the many voluntary organisations in the county. One outstanding example

is the membership of the Civil Defence Corps which has more volunteers per thousand of population (34.34) than any other county in the country. The county forms part of the Eastern Region and the next highest is only 18.47 per thousand of population.

It is not surprising that, in this agricultural county, the County Council own a very large estate, one of the largest in the country, administered on its behalf by the Smallholdings Committee. The estate of over 10,000 acres consists of very highly productive land where thirty-five acres will provide a reasonable living and yet enable a man to put something by for the time when he is ready to take on a larger farm. It is this policy of placing farm workers on smallholdings with a view to their getting the necessary experience before moving on to larger holdings that the Committee actively encourage. They are able to place approximately twenty-one new tenants a year on one or other of their farms.

The Health Committee are responsible for local health services within the National Health Scheme and close integration is necessary with hospital boards, general practitioners, district councils and the many voluntary agencies engaged in this field. Co-operation is therefore very important, one example of which is the placing of the larger clinics fully staffed by County Council staff, at the disposal of general practitioners for ante-natal and post-natal examinations. There is also co-operation with the Hospital Management Committee in the training of nurses and midwives who are received in this county and do their practical training as pupils with the fully qualified county nurses and midwives.

As a visitor travels around the country many examples of the work of the County Architect can be seen such as the new primary and secondary schools, a new sub-divisional police headquarters at Fletton, new fire stations at Kimbolton and Ramsey, new clinics welfare and children's homes and many others. All building projects are designed and supervised by the County Architect and his staff and are let to contractors on a fixed price basis. By this means a builder is enabled to proceed without interruption and is encouraged to make a really worthwhile job of the work in hand.

Education

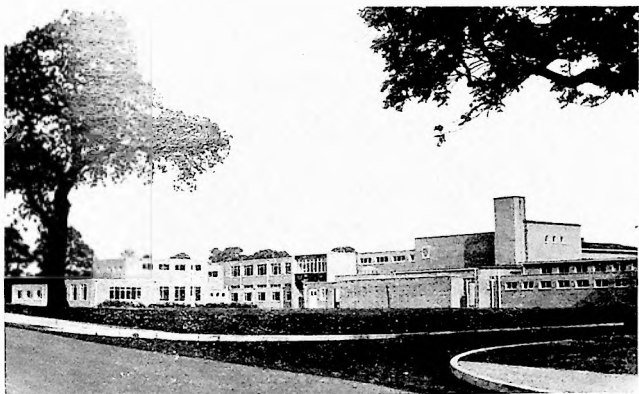
"God made the country, and man made the town," wrote the poet Cowper. There is, however, the suspicion that a few man-made amenities would not have come amiss to him, for he wrote elsewhere :

"He likes the country, but in truth must own,

Most likes it when he studies it in town."

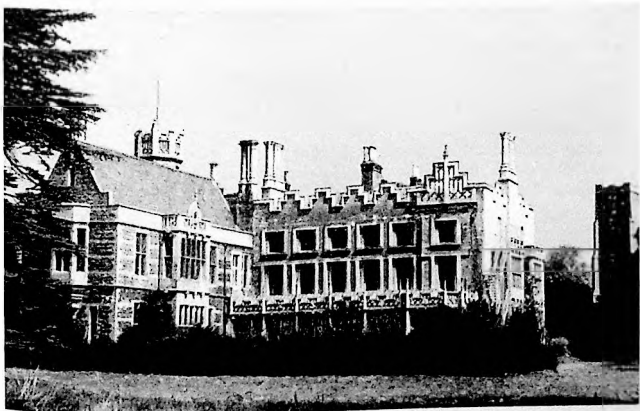
Indeed, until recently the countryman has had to pay heavily for his traditional pleasures and advantages. Fresh air, clear sunlight and healthful exercise were there to enjoy ; but there were also oil lamps, well water and primitive sanitation.

Since the war there has been a silent revolution in the countryside. Electricity has been brought into practically every village and hamlet, mains water to lonely farms and modern sanitation to the country towns and many of the large villages.



Huntingdon Secondary Modern School

DAVIN HUNTINGDON



Orton Hall Special School

BY COURTESY OF HUNTINGDONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Not the least of the disadvantages under which the countryman used to labour was the lack of good educational opportunities. Here, too, there has been great change. Something will be said below about buildings, playing fields and equipment but it is, of course, on the teachers that the quality of an educational service depends, and it is here that the reversal of the pre-war situation is most complete. In those days, for a variety of reasons, country schools had difficulty in attracting and keeping qualified teachers. Now, however, it is the towns and cities which are in difficulty to such an extent that it has been necessary for the Ministry of Education to impose a limit on the number of teachers which more favoured authorities may employ. Huntingdonshire has been able to employ teachers up to the limit set by the quota allotted to the county. This is not, of course, to say that there are no staffing difficulties but simply to illustrate the favourable position of country areas in staffing the schools.

The greatest change brought about by the Education Act of 1944 was that it laid down that there should be secondary education for all and not simply for a chosen few. Almost equally important was the fact that it laid on local education authorities the duty of providing or securing the provision of further education. The County Council is the local education authority for the county and acts through an Education Committee composed not only of County Councillors, but also of men and women with special experience in varied aspects of education.

To give reality to the requirements that there should be secondary education for all, the county has been divided into seven areas each of which will be served by one or more secondary modern schools. Five new secondary modern schools have been built already. These are at Huntingdon, Orton Longueville, St. Ives, St. Neots and Ramsey. Sawtry Secondary Modern School is under construction, and it is hoped, will be ready for use in September, 1963. The Ministry of Education have sanctioned a start in 1963-64 on a new secondary modern school at Stanground, which will replace the Fletton Secondary Modern School at present housed in the premises of the former Fletton Grammar School. The Ministry of Education has also approved further secondary school accommodation in Huntingdon to be started in 1963-64.

Attractive sites have been chosen for all of these schools, which have been spaciouly planned, and can offer a full range of opportunity for children of different abilities. Those secondary modern schools wick are already in existence offer courses leading to the General Certificate of Education at ordinary level. In addition to the usual academic subjects, instruction is provided in rural science, domestic subjects, woodwork and metalwork, pottery, arts and crafts, and so forth. Ample playing fields enable the schools to offer a wide range of physical activities—netball, hockey, tennis, Association or Rugby football, cricket and athletics. Children are also taught to swim.

The County has three grammar schools, at Orton Longueville, Ramsey and Huntingdon, and a further school is planned for St. Neots. The Committee also has special arrangements with Kimbolton School, which admits day boys sponsored by the Committee from Kimbolton and the immediately surrounding area, and boarders sponsored by the Committee

in special circumstances where it is felt that a particular boy's needs cannot be met by offering him a place at one of the day grammar schools. Of the three grammar schools, two—Huntingdon and Ramsey—are ancient foundations. Huntingdon Grammar School was rehoused in new buildings in 1939. Two years previously, Ramsey Grammar School had moved into the gracious and historic buildings known as Ramsey Abbey, founded as they are on the site of a Benedictine Monastery, parts of which still exist. In 1952 the capacity of the school was doubled by the addition of a modern block providing a gymnasium, changing rooms, laboratories, a music room, an art room and classrooms. Orton Longueville Grammar School which replaced Fleiton Grammar School was brought into use at the beginning of the summer term, 1959.

Selection of children for secondary education is carried out through a procedure which has been developed in co-operation with the teachers of the county. There are written tests, but weight is also given to other factors including school record and the opinion of the primary school head teacher. In 1960, the latest year for which comparable figures are available, the percentage of 13-year old children in grammar schools was 18.6, as against a national average county figure of 18.5.

If a child wishes to follow a career for which the General Certificate of Education is needed, there is an opportunity of selection for the grammar school at eleven years of age (indeed, at ten years of age in the case of an exceptionally brilliant child). Should the child not be found suitable for grammar school education at this age, there is a review at the age of twelve when recommended candidates may sit the "over-age" or "late developers" examination. Beyond this age there is no formal examination for transfer, but transfers between secondary modern and grammar schools can be and are carried out by arrangements between the two headmasters concerned.

The grammar school moreover, is not the only place where the G.C.E. examination can be taken; the secondary modern schools also provide G.C.E. Courses. It sometimes happens, however, that a child develops late and it is not until the age of fourteen or fifteen that it is ready to attempt a course of this standard. For such children G.C.E. courses are available at the St. Neots Technical Institute, or at institutes administered by neighbouring local education authorities.

As each secondary modern school has been built, the transfer to it of the senior children has made more room in the primary schools and it has been possible in those schools to carry out very considerable improvements. The Committee believes in the value of the country school but has had to balance the desirability of having a school in every village against the need for getting together sufficient numbers of children to form efficient schools. They do not think that it is desirable for a teacher to deal with the educational needs of children between five, and eleven years old in a one-teacher school. A three-teacher school where each teacher would only have to cope with two age groups seems to the Committee a desirable minimum, but the population in some parts of the county is so scattered that it has been necessary to accept two teacher schools as an alternative to unduly long journeys for the children. Since the war twenty-one very small

schools have been closed, and several more are scheduled for closure.

Very considerable improvements have been carried out at primary schools throughout the county. Five new primary schools have been built (at Stanground, Godmanchester, Orton Longueville, Upwood and St. Neots—the last named being an infants' school). Work on a sixth new primary school (at Huntingdon) has just started and the Ministry of Education has sanctioned further new primary schools, two at Huntingdon and at Stanground, Somersham and Abbots Ripton. Four more have been so extensively remodelled as to be the equivalent of new schools, namely Ramsey Spinning Infants, Holme V.C., Houghton and Stanground V.C. Additions of classrooms have been made at a number of other schools and practically every school which will be retained under the County Development Plan has been provided with electric light, waterborne sanitation, and improved heating, and has been redecorated in light and cheerful colours. Improvements have also been carried out to most of the playgrounds, and many of them have been equipped with outdoor climbing apparatus. As in the case of the secondary schools, much has been done to improve the playing fields and there are arrangements for swimming lessons.

School meals are provided in all schools, except two very small country schools which are scheduled for closure and where there is no local demand. Over half the children take advantage of this service.

There are eleven categories of handicapped children but in most categories the number is so small that the County's needs can be met by securing places at schools run by voluntary bodies on a national basis (e.g. schools for the blind, deaf, and so forth). For educationally sub-normal children, however, the county makes its own local provision, except that boarding places for boys are still provided at schools outside the county. A day and boarding school for educationally sub-normal girls is provided at Orton Hall.

The technical institute at St. Neots offers courses in electrical and mechanical engineering, building crafts, commerce and general subjects including G.C.E. courses. Arrangements have been made with the Peterborough Local Education Authority for the admission to their technical college, of students in the north of the county. Classes in agriculture for apprentices and others are at present based on the St. Neots Technical Institute, but the County Council is building an Agricultural Education Centre at Sawtry which will cater for students from this County and also the Soke of Peterborough. The Ministry of Education have approved the building of a new technical college at Huntingdon shortly. Local provision will, by and large, be for courses up to Ordinary National Certificate level. For students who wish to go further, the Committee has a scheme for major and further education awards under which suitable students can be assisted financially to take courses at colleges of technology or universities throughout the country. The conditions governing major awards, including income scales and methods of assessment, are those adopted nationally.

Evening classes in a considerable variety of subjects are provided at thirteen centres throughout the county. The county is rich in voluntary societies of every kind, and the Committee helps to foster many of these

activities through the appointment of staff and in other ways. The County Music Committee functions as a sub-committee of the Education Committee and the County Music Organiser advises on all aspects of music in education, organising music courses, festivals and concerts throughout the county. The Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Community Council receives a grant towards the services of a drama organiser.

The backbone of the County Youth Service is, of course, the voluntary club, of which there are fifty-seven in the county affiliated to the County Youth Committee. In addition, the Committee maintains six youth centres, and one youth and community centre at Brampton. There is a full programme of county events such as, for instance, the table tennis tournament, the drama festival, and county youth athletics. The youth service also encourages outdoor activities by the holding of training courses in sailing, canoeing and other similar activities and the loan of equipment for camping and expedition work. In addition clubs are encouraged to undertake holiday exchange visits with other countries. These exchanges follow the arrangements which have been made for county visits during the past ten years to continental countries including Germany, Holland and France.

The Committee runs a Youth Employment Service which offers Vocational Guidance and advice on obtaining employment to all young people up to the age of 18 years, and beyond that age for those still in full-time education. School-leaving interviews, careers talks, films and visits arranged to places of employment all contribute in assisting youngsters to make a wise choice of career. Information on opportunities for employment and training both locally and further afield, are also made available to them. The Youth Employment Bureau is at Wykeham House in Huntingdon's Market Square, and there are part-time Sub-Offices at St. Neots, St. Ives and Ramsey.

The County Council operates a library service through the Education Committee. The headquarters of the County Library is in Huntingdon, where there are lending and reference libraries, music and drama collections, a local historic library and the Ladds Archaeological Library. The headquarters lending library also functions as the branch serving Huntingdon and district. Other district branches have been established at Fletton, Ramsey, St. Ives and St. Neots. New buildings have recently been provided at Fletton and St. Neots and the others are to be re-housed in due course. A new branch library is to be built at Stanground in the near future.

The provision of an additional vehicle has made possible a Mobile Service to all rural areas, 140 stopping places are visited on a fortnightly basis.

A comprehensive School Library Service is maintained covering all schools in the county. Books are also provided for special centres in Welfare Homes, Hospitals and the like.

Apart from schools maintained by the Local Education Authority there are in the County the following direct grant or private schools : Kimbolton School ; Montagu House School, Kimbolton ; Northfield School, Stonely, Kimbolton ; Northcote House School, St. Ives ; Slepe Hall, St. Ives ; Tenterleas School, St. Ives ; St. Hugh's Christian Seminary, Buckden Towers, Buckden ; Cedar House School, St. Neots ; Queen Elizabeth's School, Godmanchester.

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7

Natural History, Holiday and Leisure Pursuits, Fishing and Boating

BY J. E. H. BLACKIE, C.B.E., M.A., F.R.E.S.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE is today a highly cultivated farming county ; its two characteristic primitive states, forest on the high lands and fen on the low, are now only vestiges. At Wood Walton there is still an area of genuine fenland maintained with some difficulty and at great expense by the Nature Conservancy, but at Holme the fen has dried up and has been replaced by birch woodland with heather (*Erica tetralix*) in places. Everywhere else the fen has been drained and cultivated—and Whittlesey Mere, once a favourite yachting centre, is now rich farming land.

Forest vestiges are more extensive. At Abbots Ripton, at Alconbury Hill and northwards along the west side of A1 there are still big woods, and about Staughton in the south and Gidding further north there are more wooded areas, with the pedunculate oak as the predominant tree and blackthorn and privet as the characteristic shrubs.

The Ouse valley has also changed considerably from its original state, the most notable recent change being caused by gravel quarrying which has created considerable artificial lakes on which water-birds breed and winter.

The main attraction in the county for holiday-makers is undoubtedly boating and at all the riverside towns and villages, boats may be hired. St. Ives is a great sailing centre, being the headquarters of the Cambridge University Sailing Club and the county sailing club is at Houghton, a mile or more upstream. In hard winters the county is unrivalled for skating ; the national championships are often held at Bury fen near Bluntisham and if the frost is preceded by flooding, Port Holme, the most wonderful water-meadow in England, and many other flat fields, are thronged with skaters.

Fishing is the most popular sport in Huntingdonshire and the Ouse attracts many week-end anglers. It is one of the best coarse-fishing rivers in the country, for every coarse fish is found in it and there are occasional sea-trout ; the eel-fishing is particularly good. The gravel pits at Offord, Paxton, Fenstanton and elsewhere contain pike and good sport may be had with a spinner. Some of them have been stocked with brown and rainbow trout and provide the best sport that the county can offer to the fly-fisherman.

The Fitzwilliam Foxhounds, with kennels at Milton, north of the Nene, cover most of the county. The Cambridgeshire come in on the south side and the Oakley just impinges in the west at Kimbolton. The Marquess of Exeter hunts his own hounds on the east about Ramsey

and Warboys. The going is rather heavy and there is now little waste land, less pasture than formerly and more plough but sport is often good especially in the north-western parts. The Fitzwilliam hold an annual point-to-point meeting at Waternewton and the Cambridgeshire Hunt hold theirs at Hemingford.

Hares abound in the county and are regularly coursed at Great Stukeley and from time to time in other places. The Cambridgeshire Harriers hunt the southern part of the county. The carcasses of deer are occasionally to be seen in the poulterers' shops in Huntingdon and are perhaps escapes from Woburn which harbour in Brampton Wood and possibly elsewhere.

Of game-birds the pheasant is pretty common and a good number of shooting men rear them and put them down usually on quite a small scale. The partridge-shooting, which used to be very good indeed, is now at rather a low ebb, partly because of changes in farming and partly because of a series of wet summers. The French or red-legged partridge is generally commoner than the native bird. Snipe are occasional, but woodcock are present in some numbers in most winters and are also a breeding bird.

The race-meetings at Brampton, held four times a year, are all that country meetings ought to be—friendly, not too large and in a delightful setting. All these activities are the more enjoyable for being part of the daily life of the county—not mere “holiday attractions” such as resorts offer.

Huntingdonshire was once one of the most favoured of all English counties for its fauna and flora and naturalists flocked to Whittlesey, Yaxley, Holme and Monks Wood for the treasures which abounded there. Of these the most famous was the large copper butterfly which was to be found at Holme and Whittlesey and which became extinct about 1846. The very similar Dutch form of this insect has been introduced into Wood Walton fen where it is very strictly protected, and its food-plant, the great water-dock, has been specially cultivated there. It is one of the most dazzlingly beautiful of butterflies and the sight of the male with its burnished copper and pale blue colouring is unforgettable. Monks Wood is the metropolis of another rarity, happily still flourishing, the black hairstreak butterfly, but the purple emperor, which was abundant there sixty years ago, is now gone and the white admiral which seemed to be establishing itself just after the war has disappeared. Improved drainage and extended cultivation have banished or reduced a great many once common insects, but one or two seem to be increasing, in particular the very local chequered skipper which has recently re-appeared in Monks Wood after an absence of over fifty years.

The birds and animals of Huntingdonshire call for no very special attention, apart from the recent increase of ducks and waders which followed the extension of water-filled gravel pits. There are three heronries and among the most interesting visitors of recent years have been bittern, buzzard, merlin, hobby, osprey, whooper swan, Bewick's swan, ferruginous duck, puffin, wryneck, great skua, little ringed plover, sandwich tern, little auk and great grey shrike.

The flora is full of interest. It includes herb paris which grows near Abbots Ripton, dyers' greenweed at Woolley and Old Weston, orange balsam and the now very scarce fritillary on Port Holme, and the minute rush, *Luzula pallens*, of which Wood Walton is one of the only two stations in the United Kingdom. There are some surprising absentees. Foxglove and red campion are hardly recorded ; there is no harebell or goldenrod and ferns are very scarce. Gorse has only one station at Stangate Hill and orchids are rarer than formerly. Hedgerow timber, chiefly English elm and ash, is much reduced and many of the delightful shady lanes of the past which were so grateful in hot weather to carter and herd, are now bare, dull tracks between hedgeless fields of sugar beet. The Huntingdon elm (*Ulmus x hollandica* var. *vegeta*) is still not uncommon.

Monks Wood, Holme Fen and Wood Walton Fen are now owned by the Nature Conservancy from whom permission to visit must be obtained. The Huntingdonshire Fauna and Flora Society, founded in 1948, exists to protect and record the wild life of the county and publishes a report every spring. A substantial amount has been added to our knowledge of Huntingdonshire birds, butterflies and moths and wild flowers during the past decade.

In spite of brickworks along the northern boundary, and mechanised farming everywhere, it is surprising how much of the county remains unspoiled and it has a wonderful opportunity of preserving its charm and of seeing that development is seemly and orderly. A lover of the English rural scene will not find in Huntingdonshire anything dramatic in the way of scenery. The county has no rock, no moorland and little in the way of hills. Yet only in the eastern fens is it flat and to the north and west there are many gentle hillsides, forest relics, brooks and lanes and meadows where one is little aware of subtopia, and its pervasive nastiness.

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HUNTINGDONSHIRE is not a county of great estates and vast houses. It contains a large number of delightful village houses mostly of the 16th and 17th century and many solid country farm houses of the early 19th century, monuments to a period of agricultural prosperity and social ambition. There is a number of smaller country houses of which many have passed out of private hands and some of which exist only as memories.

Abbots Ripton Hall (Lord De Ramsey) is a house of singular grace and elegance, with splendid gardens and what must be one of the very few recently-made ornamental canals in the country.

Three houses may justly be described as great historic mansions, Elton, Hinchbrooke and Kimbolton.

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Elton Hall which lies in the north of the county, eight miles south-west of Peterborough is the property of Sir Richard Proby, Bt. It was built in 1664 round a 15th-century tower and includes, as so often such houses do, some 19th-century additions. It contains a splendid collection of pictures and some fine 18th-century furniture, and in the library are some early manuscripts and printed books including some Caxtons. The garden has some fine yew hedges and, with the house, is open to visitors on Thursday and Saturday afternoons from June to September and also on Bank Holidays, except Good Friday.

Hinchingbrooke, with its fine timbered parkland, has preserved unspoiled the beauty of the western approach to Huntingdon. It is an Elizabethan mansion, the former home of the Earls of Sandwich, and is uninhabited at the time of writing. The gardens remain as they were designed by the first Earl and in the grounds there is one of the county's three heronries.

Kimbolton Castle, an imposing Palladian house in the delightful village of Kimbolton near the Bedfordshire boundary, is now occupied by Kimbolton School and is usually open to the public during the school summer holidays. The medieval castle was re-designed and transformed by Sir John Vanbrugh and has recently been carefully restored. It was the ancestral home of the Dukes of Manchester who take their title not from this Lancashire town but from the ancient borough of Godmanchester on the south side of Huntingdon bridge.

Hemingford Grey Manor House and gardens are usually open once during the summer under the National Gardens Scheme. Among gardens also open to view are—River House, Hemingford Grey and the Thatched Cottage and the Hermitage (both in Hemingford Abbots), Offord Cluny Manor, etc. The dates of their opening are advertised locally.



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PART II TOWNS AND RURAL DISTRICTS

Huntingdon

P. G. M. DICKINSON, F.S.A., F.R.HIST.S., F.R.G.S.

WHO founded Huntingdon, and when, are vexed questions which still await satisfactory answer by historians. Centuries ago the River Ouse formed, not only an easily navigable route to central England from the North Sea, but also a formidable barrier cutting the ancient Ermine (or Erming) Street, one of the principal means of communication between London and York. Thus it was that Huntingdon, strategically placed on the north bank and guarding the place where the Ermine Street crossed the river, acquired an importance out of all proportion to its size.

Little is known of the town's early history, but in Roman times there must have been a small colony here as pottery and coins are occasionally found, generally lying about ten feet or so beneath the present surface. This settlement stood a short distance from the river, apparently on the site of the present Market Hill. After the Romans departed, the Saxons came. Then, from the early 10th century, took place the numerous invasions of the Danes, using the river for their incursions. It was they who constructed a fortified stronghold or "Burh" (from which is derived the word "Borough") close by the junction of the Alconbury Brook with the Ouse, and some banks and ditches still visible on Mill Common mark the site. This "Burh" was taken by Edward the Elder in A.D. 921 and he repaired its damaged ramparts. During the more peaceful times which followed, people settled here and a town began to take shape. There is evidence towards the end of the century that a market had come into existence and a Mint established, sure signs of rising stability and affluence.

By the time of the Conquest the town had spread towards the river crossing, and when in 1068 William the Conqueror gave orders that the castle should be built, a number of houses had to be destroyed to make way for it. With the Normans came new ideas, both secular and religious, and the following 200 years saw the rise of Huntingdon to the peak of its importance amongst the towns of England. During that period a wooden bridge was built to replace the fordway, the Market Hill was laid out and many houses built, a Priory of Augustinian Canons was founded—the first of its Order in England—and no less than sixteen churches and three hospitals erected. The Benedictine Nunnery at Hinchingsbrooke also came into being, but the Austin Friary (quite distinct from the Augustinian Canons) was not founded until about 1285.

But this prosperity was short lived and from the mid 14th-century a decline set in and the Black Death of 1348-49 marked the end of the town's medieval greatness. A further blow followed in the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536-40 when all three religious houses disappeared, and with them much of the local trade. Throughout the 16th-18th centuries Huntingdon became a backwater in the history of England, little heard of except for a period during the Civil Wars when, for a short



All Saints Church, Huntingdon

BY COURTESY OF HUNTINGDONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL



Toseland Hall

P. G. M. DICKINSON

while, it became the headquarters, first of Cromwell and then of King Charles. A trade revival commenced in the latter years of the 18th century, due to the much improved roads and the urge of Englishmen to travel. In due course there was established a busy posting trade and many new inns and shops were built to cope with the increased business. This continued well into the middle of the 19th-century when the coming of the railways destroyed the posting trade but did little else. So lean times returned and lasted till the beginning of the 20th-century when prosperity unexpectedly returned and, to everyone's surprise, Agriculture came into its own again. Between the two world wars and subsequently, new industries were established—notably vegetable canning and rubber processing, to mention but two—bringing employment and money to the town. New housing estates sprang up and the population by the mid-century was more than double that of a hundred years before.

Huntingdon prides itself on being a borough "time out of mind"—so long ago that no one knows when it first acquired that dignity, though it must have been some time in the 10th-century. It is referred to as a "Royal" borough in Domesday Book (A.D. 1086), and between 1205 and 1686 no less than eighteen charters were granted by the Kings and Queens of England to testify to its ancient Rights and Privileges. Of these charters, fourteen are still preserved amongst the Corporation archives, together with many other written evidences of its historic past.

Topographically speaking, Huntingdon is a long and narrow town stretching nearly a mile and a half along the Ermine Street from the river bridge. Within its rather circumscribed area are many buildings of unusual beauty and interest. The handsome bridge which joins the town to Godmanchester was completed in 1332 and is recognised by experts to be one of the finest medieval bridges in the country. Close by are the extensive earthworks of the castle founded by William the Conqueror, now in part a public open space. Of the sixteen churches but two are left, though the sites of the others are known. All Saints, occupying a rather cramped space in the Market Hill, stands on the site of a Saxon "minster" and, though largely rebuilt late in the 15th-century, retains a Norman west wall and a 14th-century tower. St. Mary's, the larger church, stands outside the boundary of the early town, and has a spacious churchyard. It, too, has Norman work in its south aisle but is largely a 13th-century rebuilding. The beautiful 14th-century tower partly collapsed in the early years of the 17th-century and its eastern side and part of the northern are of that date. The Augustinian Priory stood where is now the cemetery. All traces of it above ground have long since disappeared, but often in digging graves its foundations are encountered. Cromwell House, in High Street, occupies the site of the Austin Friary. It is an early 19th-century building retaining but few traces of the monastery. Its fame lies in being the birthplace of Oliver Cromwell in 1599 and a plaque records this fact. Facing the east wall of All Saints' Church is the Hospital of St. John the Baptist, founded about 1175 as an almshouse for old people and a hostelry for travellers. After the Dissolution it was converted into a Grammar School about 1565 and it was here that Oliver Cromwell and Samuel Pepys went to

school. It ceased to be a school when the new Grammar School was built in Brampton Road in 1939. Recently it has been converted by the County Council into a Museum of Cromwelliana. The building is chiefly of Norman date and has a magnificent west doorway, but all has been heavily restored, the aisles destroyed, and the arches built up.

Of medieval buildings, none other remains, but there are several timber-framed houses of the 16th and 17th-centuries here and there. Walden House, of brick, is 17th-century—it is now used for County Council Offices. Huntingdon is largely a Georgian town, however, and is justly noted for the many fine examples of houses of this period to be found in many of its streets—the principal feature being the “Mansard” roofs, easily recognisable by their double-canted outline.

The stately Town Hall was built in 1745 and added to later. The ballroom, recently redecorated in its period colours, has around its walls some remarkable paintings of Royalty and others by famous artists; one, recently identified, being by Gainsborough. Of the many inns but four of note remain and only two of these still perform the function for which they were built. The most famous is the “George” which retains two sides of its 17th-century courtyard, one with an open gallery and external staircase. The other two wings were rebuilt in 1865 after a disastrous fire. The “Falcon” in Market Hill, said to have been the headquarters of Oliver Cromwell during the Civil Wars, has a pleasant oriel window and a massive door. The former “Crown” has been divided into shops and the “Fountain” is now a garage. Whitwell House, built in 1727, Ferrar House, Cowper House and Montagu House (Headquarters of the Huntingdon R.D.C.) are all good examples of this period. To the 19th-century is due Trinity Church with its tall spire, the grandiose Westminster Bank, and the remains of the County Gaol in St. Peter’s Hill. The County Council buildings occupy the former Grammar School built in the early years of the 20th-century, and the “Romanesque” Roman Catholic church dates from 1902. Hartford, a picturesque riverside village east of the town, was incorporated in the borough in 1935.

Hinchingbrooke, standing about half a mile along the Brampton Road, is principally of mid-16th-century date, but was severely damaged by fire in 1830 and was subsequently largely reconstructed. Formerly a convent of Benedictine nuns, it was converted into a house after the Reformation and its ground plan shows that many of the medieval walls were retained, though few architectural details of that period have survived. It became the seat of the Cromwell family and Sir Henry Cromwell, known as the “Golden Knight,” entertained Queen Elizabeth here in 1564 when she knighted him. The house was sold to Sir Henry Montagu in 1627 from whom it has descended to the present Earl of Sandwich. A notable feature is the gatehouse which is thought to have come from Ramsey Abbey. It has recently been acquired by the County Council for conversion to a Grammar School.

Finally, perhaps the most attractive feature of Huntingdon is the River Ouse, a rendezvous of fishermen and a mecca for those who like river boating. Along its banks are many pleasant walks. Then there are the Commons which almost encircle the town and provide both the

inhabitants and visitors with pleasant open spaces. Close by is the Portholme, one of the largest meadows in England, and the habitat of a number of rare wild flowers, each of which seems to have its special area in which to grow. The views hereabouts are spacious and one of the most pleasant is the graceful spire of Godmanchester church rising above the distant trees, an unforgettable sight on a pleasant summer's evening.

Godmanchester

P. G. M. DICKINSON, F.S.A., F.R.HIST.S., F.R.G.S.

THE pleasant town of Godmanchester, facing Huntingdon across the Ouse, is of very ancient origin and its striking pentagonal plan betokens a Roman ancestry. Indeed, from time to time, relics of this era have been unearthed, though often they lie several feet below the ground. Recently, fragments of the Town Wall and a bath have been discovered. No less than three early roads converge here prior to crossing the river and there is every indication that one, at least—that coming from Cambridge—was in existence before the Roman settlement was established. It seems certain that the layout of the Saxon town which followed its Roman predecessor was altered in the 13th-century to suit the requirements of a market town, though as far as we know no actual market was ever legally set up, either then or later.

The early constitution of the town is unusual, a fact which is clearly brought out by the fine and comprehensive series of charters (some in duplicate) and other documents which are preserved amongst the Corporation muniments. The first charter, given by King John in 1214, converted the town into a self-governing manor, a rare form of local government, the inhabitants being termed "free tenants." In exchange for this privilege the townsmen agreed to pay the king and his successors £120 a year, and this sum is still paid today, though not to Royalty, as it was alienated about 300 years ago. It was not till 1604 that Godmanchester became a borough, when a Charter of Incorporation was obtained from King James, the annual money payment still continuing. Apart from its charters, the borough possesses a beautiful silver mace of 1745 and a rare silver seal of the 13th-century. In 1961 the Corporation ceased to exist, as the town was united with Huntingdon to form the new Borough of Huntingdon and Godmanchester.

Owing to its curious early constitution, Godmanchester never developed as an ordinary town normally did but retained its essentially "village" character so that today there are but few shops and no real shopping centre. The perimeter is fringed with ancient farmhouses, a characteristic which clearly indicates its agricultural background, as does the extensive Common belonging to the Freeman which partly encircles the town.

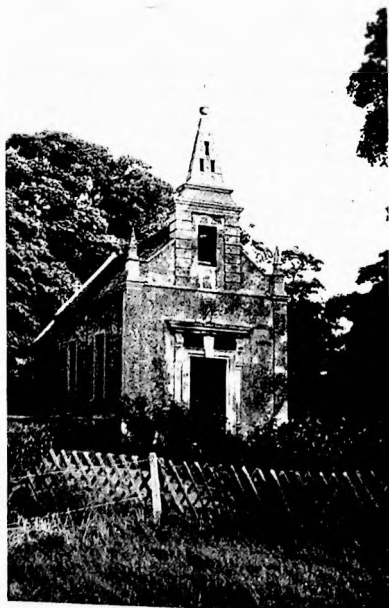
The stately Parish Church of St. Mary, one of the largest in the county, is of many periods. It seems to have originated in a Norman cruciform church having a central tower, but practically nothing of this building is left as a complete rebuilding on a larger scale seems to have taken place in the 13th-century. In the process the central tower was removed and a new one built at the western end of the nave, the chancel was



Chinese Bridge, Godmanchester

P. G. M. DICKINSON

Little Gidding Church



P. G. M. DICKINSON

rebuilt and lengthened and the nave given aisles. A further extensive remodelling was undertaken in the early years of the 15th-century when the present spacious nave took the place of the narrower 13th-century one and the transepts disappeared. About 1500 the chancel arch was widened, cutting into the two mysterious lancet windows in the gable above. Finally, in 1623, the present magnificent western tower and spire replaced the older tower which had become ruinous and everybody in the town was taxed to pay for it. Special features to be noticed are the interesting range of carved stalls in the choir and the unique 13th-century carved mass-dial (still retaining its metal gnomon) on one of the southern chancel buttresses.

In addition to the church there are many interesting houses scattered about the town, the earlier ones chiefly of the 16th and 17th-centuries being timber-framed and sometimes thatched, while the later ones of the next two centuries are of mellowed brick, both red and yellow. Each road has its quota of old houses and "Plantagenet House," Tudor House and Looker's Farm in Earning Street, Porch Farm in London Road, and the former "Shepherd and Dog" Inn at the far end of West Street, are the best examples of the earlier type; while Island Hall in Post Street and Farm Hall in West Street are noble specimens of later brickwork. Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, also of brick, was founded about 1560 and part of the original building still stands, but it was much altered and enlarged in 1851 and later. On the porch is an inscribed stone recording the foundation. Close by is the "Tudor" Town Hall built in 1899 and the famous Chinese Bridge, which leads over the mill lade to pleasant walks on the Portholme and along the river banks.

The Causeway, an elevated roadway leading northwards from the town to Huntingdon Bridge is of medieval date and was reconstructed in 1637, but was heightened and widened in 1767 and 1784 when the two brick bridges were built and the avenue of trees planted. In the parapet of the southern bridge is a stone with a modern inscription, copied from the original one, recording the first reconstruction by Dr. Robert Cooke, Master of Huntingdon Hospital, who narrowly escaped drowning while trying to cross to Godmanchester in a flood. Huntingdon bridge is reputed to have been built partly by the men of Huntingdon and partly by those of Godmanchester, that part built by Godmanchester being minus the ornamental arcading and much plainer than that ascribed to Huntingdon. It is said that the two ends were commenced at the same time, but without any co-ordinated plan, so that it was only by luck they met in the middle and, to this day, the bridge has an awkward bend in it to prove the assertion.

Huntingdon Rural District

P. G. M. DICKINSON, F.S.A., F.R.HIST.S., F.R.G.S.

THIS is by far the most extensive Rural District in the county and comprises thirty-two villages. There is a little fenland in the north-east corner around Wood Walton and numerous woods in the centre and western parts, the most notable of which is Monks' Wood, famous



The road to Spaldwick in Ellington Brook Valley

BY COURTESY OF HUNTINGDONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

for its natural history, but generally speaking the area is now largely arable with pasture along the river valleys. Places of widely varying character are included within its boundaries : Brampton, but a short walk from Huntingdon, with memories of Pepys, the remote and peaceful Giddings—in the smallest of the three was the home of the Ferrar family and the “ Protestant Nunnery ” in Stuart times, of which the sole reminder is the tiny church with its unique brass font—and Buckworth with its charming spire and dwindling population. Sawtry is a growing place, luckily just off A1 and all its incessant traffic, which cuts the district neatly in two from North to South. Here was once a noted Cistercian Abbey on the edge of the fens, not far from Woodwalton church. Scarcely a single stone remains of its once extensive buildings but its plan is clearly marked in the ground by trenches dug in the mid-19th-century when its foundations were dug out to make some local roads.

In early and medieval times much of the district was thickly wooded and the villages tended to be settled in man-made clearings. Many of the place-names, mostly of Saxon origin, testify to this fact—the Raveleys, the Stukeleys, the Riptons, Brampton, Bythorn, Upwood and Woodwalton. After the coming of the Normans, the woods began to disappear or to be broken up into smaller units as the population increased and more ploughland was required. Castles were built at Woodwalton and probably at Leighton, and practically all the Saxon churches, no doubt of wood, were rebuilt in stone. Then came the Manor Houses, and most villages had at least one, but many have disappeared, leaving only the moated sites to mark the places where they stood. There were the great houses of the local gentry, Conington Castle (now destroyed), Brampton Park, Ripton Hall, Upwood House and Stukeley Hall, and, later still, the beautiful timber-framed or brick houses of the yeomen,

farmers and lesser folk which are the chief adornment of many of the villages.

It is difficult to recommend to the visitor any particular village, church or house which he ought to see, without leaving out something equally attractive and interesting elsewhere. Perhaps the prettiest villages are those along the valley of the Ellington Brook, Ellington itself, perched atop its little steep hill (the church contains some piebald angels in its roof), Easton, built along the banks of a minor stream and just off the main road, and Spaldwick with its fine church, locally known as the "Cathedral of the Valley," and its many ancient houses. But other villages are almost equally delightful—Abbots Ripton, set amongst the trees and famous for its hall and leaning church tower; Hamerton and its pretty thatched cottages and curious bridge; Upton, aloof from everything, and Molesworth, which many visit to see the Pets' Cemetery and read the quaint epitaphs on the strange memorials erected to cats, dogs, monkeys and even birds.

Here and there are remote and little-known villages: Bythorn and Keyston—here is a superb cruciform church. Old Weston and Winwick on the high western edge of the district, and tiny upland Barham and forgotten Woolley whose historic church has only recently been destroyed.

Well-thatched cottages abound (for the thatcher's art has not died out hereabouts), sturdy farmhouses of the Enclosures Acts dot the landscape amidst their ploughlands and trim gardens grace every village and are a joy to behold. Abounding trees grow in every direction in the hedgerows and on the hills, and everywhere is rural beauty, quiet, restrained and pleasing to the eye.

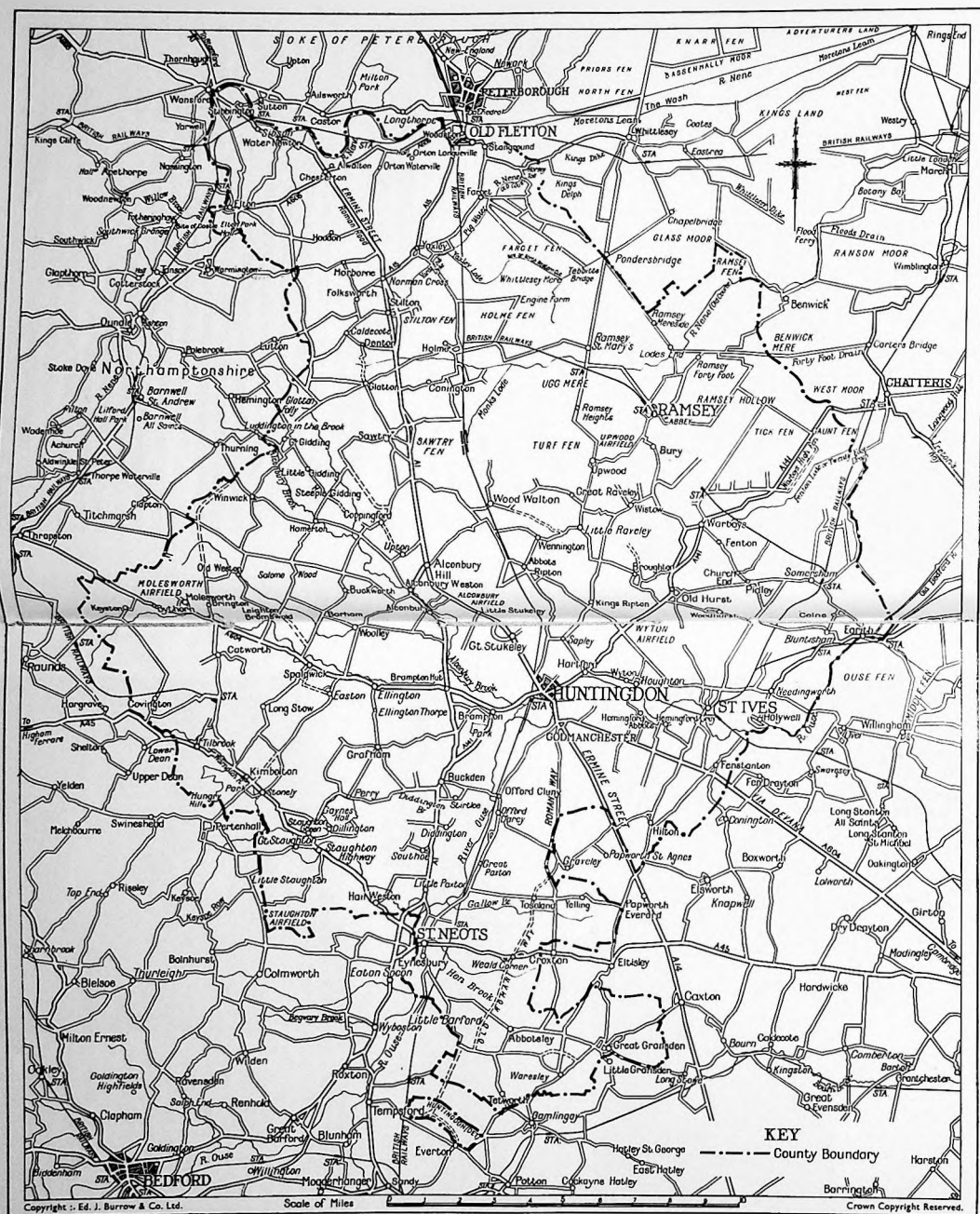
Norman Cross Rural District

W. G. HARDWICK

A ROAD, and not a river, dominates the Norman Cross District, for the Great North Road cuts it from end to end, while the river here only curls round its northern and western borders.

The motorist of the near future, in traversing the district along A1, will not pass through a single village. He will little guess that on his left (if he enters from the south) is a whole series of villages, lying a mile or two off and parallel to Ermine Street. Glatton, Denton and Caldecote, Folksworth and Wasingley, Morborne and Haddon—how typically Anglo-Saxon they are! Their substantial farmhouses and picturesque cottages speak of stability, while from the higher ground near them are views of pleasing beauty. If the motorist turns to the right he can in a few minutes experience the loneliness of the fens—and enjoy wonderful sunsets.

Just north of Kate's Cabin (here the Peterborough-Oundle road crosses A1), where the original Ermine Street crossed the Nene, lay Durobrivae, a pottery centre in Roman times. Around here, in the 1820's, Mr. Artis, Steward to Earl Fitzwilliam, uncovered mosaic floors, hypocausts, kilns



A MAP OF THE COUNTY



The Haycock Inn at Wansford, near Norman Cross

MUSTOGRAPH

Norman Cross

*French prisoners of war
memorial*



P. G. M. DICKINSON

and pottery. Here, recently, keen archaeologists have been feverishly excavating, in front of the road-making juggernauts which, yard by yard, seal in and crush forever any immovable discoveries which are made.

How different from the activities of the Romano-British potters were those which saluted the coach-traveller in the early 1800's at Norman Cross, in the angle made by A1 and the Peterborough road. In this area during the Napoleonic Wars was hastily constructed a depot for prisoners-of-war, mainly seamen, whom the hulks could not take. The gaunt, wooden casernes, in which they were tightly packed in tiered hammocks at night, held up to 6,000 prisoners at a time, and it required up to 5,000 militia in equally stark wooden barracks to guard them. Within a few acres for a short time was concentrated a population equal to the district's present total, but now cattle graze over the fields and not a vestige of a wooden building is visible on the site. Only the Eagle Monument attracts attention. It faces what was the main entrance, and turns its head away from the 1,700 French and allied prisoners buried in the field behind it. A remarkable collection of bone and straw marquetry articles made by the prisoners, and sold to the neighbourhood, can now be seen in Peterborough Museum.

Peace removed the prison, but prosperity, or the hope of it, was the chief motive for the removing of Whittlesey Mere, which was much nearer to Holme and Yaxley (by far the largest village in the district) than to Whittlesey. This had at times been the greatest expanse of fresh water south of the Lakes. Through it ran the old River Nene, and on it the Earl of Oxford sailed his ships. Providing fresh fish and wild-fowl for the needs of its humble neighbours, it was in the first half of the 19th-century the resort of the gentry, who had here their boat-houses and regattas, their bandstand and refreshment booths. The Mere was drained by the Wells family of Holme about 1850, and the famous iron post which now records a twelve-foot shrinkage of the peat level since then, was brought from the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Not the "big house," but the stone manor-house, with its roof of thatch or Collyweston slate—plus the equally solid rectory—is typical of the district. Washingley Hall, associated with the Knights Templars, has been destroyed. Orton Longueville Hall and Park, where a few years ago the ramrod figure of the Marquess of Huntly was a familiar sight, has become one of the principal educational centres of the county. Only Elton Hall, the seat of the Proby family, is of the type to prompt its being opened to the public. Of coaching inns there remain the Bell Inn at Stilton, a name familiar as that of the famous cheese, and the Haycock at Wansford which, by its name and sign, recalls Drunken Barnaby. There are massively built water-mills, in use until recent years, at Water Newton and Elton, and enough coarse fish in the river to secure its choice for the All-England Championships.

Of the churches, one thinks of the impressive dignity of Yaxley, queening the Fens with its lofty spire, the beautiful setting of Elton, the St. Christopher mural and "crusader" effigy of Orton Longueville, the Elizabethan pulpit of Orton Waterville (acquired in the 18th-century for a pound or so from Great St. Mary's, Cambridge), the unusual arch

arrangement of Alwalton, the memorials of little-known Chesterton and the sombreness of Haddon's Norman interior.

The district cannot praise many famous men which it has begotten, but the Dryden family was connected with Chesterton, and Sir Robert Cotton, immortal for his manuscripts, had a home at Denton. Sir Henry Royce, the eminent engineer, was born near the river at Alwalton, whence as a boy he peddled papers in Peterborough and journeyed to the town's railway engine-sheds for his first acquaintance with metals. And what of the wayward boy who lived for a time at the Norman Cross prison, where his father was an officer? From that distasteful home George Borrow often wandered to Whittlesey Mere. In a lane off the Great North Road he had his fateful first meeting with the Romany people. About 1930 Beverley Nichols purchased a picturesque cottage at Glatton, planted a garden, and wrote two of his popular books.

From Morborne Hill a beacon blazed the news of the Armada, and now on that hill a more permanent landmark has arisen—a B.B.C. aerial. From the masthead the whole Norman Cross District can be seen—a bit of England where everything is modesty, and all is satisfying!

Old Fletton

P. J. KINGSTON

FLETON, Stanground and part of Woodston form the Urban District of Old Fletton, whose motto is, appropriately enough, "*Tria juncta in uno*" (Three joined into one). It is situated immediately south of the borough of Peterborough, from which it is divided by the River Nene. Although divided for Local Government administration, Woodston remains one parish ecclesiastically.

The urban district forms the industrial north of Huntingdonshire and has an estimated population of 11,000, and consequently is the largest centre of population in the county. Prior to the advent of the 20th-century, the district was entirely rural, but with the development of the brick industry due to the great deposit of blue Oxford clay which extends into Norman Cross Rural District, the importance of the area rapidly increased until it has become probably the largest brick-producing area in the British Islands. Today "Flettons" are bricks universally known and with a world-wide reputation. The railway facilities brought into being as a result of this development have attracted other industries, to no little benefit of the inhabitants. These include light engineering, the manufacture of electrical appliances, canning, and sugar-beet processing.

One of the most characteristic features are the numerous clusters of brickyard chimneys which dominate the landscape. The disused "knot holes" from which the clay has been extracted frequently form lakes in which pike and other coarse fish abound. But these holes are often very deep, which makes them dangerous for bathing and skating.

After the Second World War the great expansion of the local industries caused new housing estates to come into being, chiefly in Stanground,



The Bell Inn, Stilton

P. G. M. DICKINSON



Brampton Hunt, Pepy's House from the main road

P. G. M. DICKINSON

and these have altered the former appearance of the countryside. This development is exemplified in Southfields Estate where new roads have been laid out, many Council houses built, and a new shopping area and a community centre used for a variety of purposes have been erected. The community centre is controlled by a management committee responsible to the Huntingdonshire County Council. Future development includes the provision of public gardens, recreation grounds and an old folks' shelter. In addition it is proposed to improve the roads by planting trees.

The area, though industrial, is not entirely devoid of natural beauty, though there are few walks except along the old towing-path by the Nene. It is the great expanse of the Fenland with its wonderful skylscapes and its spaciousness which forms the major beauty of the district.

There are few old houses left to tell of other days, but the two ancient churches of St. Margaret at Fletton and St. John at Stanground are of exceptional interest. They are the sole reminders of the Middle Ages when times and things were very different.

Fletton church dates from Norman times and the chancel is of this period. Not long after it was finished a north chapel, a new chancel arch, and a north aisle were added. At the beginning of the 14th-century a south aisle was built and the nave lengthened to meet the tower, then in process of erection. The present north aisle and south porch date from 1872. In 1917 the top of the spire was struck by lightning and had to be rebuilt. The most noteworthy feature is the pre-Conquest carved stones which will be found both on the interior and exterior walls of the chancel. They are supposed to have come from the Saxon abbey of Peterborough. West of the tower is a much mutilated standing cross of the 12th-century, once beautifully ornamented with carvings.

Stanground church is exceptional as being almost entirely of early 14th-century date and is a very handsome building, its broach spire being specially attractive. The dignified chancel has fine windows and below the south-western one is a three-light "low-side" window, often mis-called a "leper's window." The "ball-flower" ornaments, typical of the 14th-century, decorate the tower buttresses and the cornice at the base of the spire. The interior contains a number of brasses and memorials, an ancient chest, and a double piscina in the chancel.

Horse Hill Fort, on the banks of the Nene, is a very unusual and highly interesting five-sided fort of the Cromwellian period. It is protected by a rampart and ditch and at each angle is a projecting hollow bastion intended for gun emplacements. There is another of similar date and type, but rectangular, at Earith.

Ramsey

F. T. ALLEN

THE interesting town of Ramsey is quite unlike the other towns of Huntingdonshire and is situated on a peninsula of slightly elevated land, almost surrounded by the fenland. In days gone by it was inaccessible except by a causeway from Bury and was very isolated, but



The Church of St. Thomas Becket, Ramsey

J. ALLAN CASH

roads now run across the fens and connect it with Peterborough, Whittlesey and March.

It is the centre of an urban district, one of the largest in England, nearly 16,000 acres in extent. Formerly there were a number of meres, or shallow lakes, in its vicinity, the largest of which was Whittlesey Mere about 5 miles across, but all these were drained in the 19th-century and only their names remain. After the reclamation of the land several hamlet-villages came into being—Ramsey St. Mary, Ramsey Heights (a mis-spelling of "Eyots"—small islands), Ramsey Hollow, Ramsey Mereside and Forty Foot Bridge. The draining of the fens, which commenced in the 17th-century and has continued ever since, has transformed what was formerly a marshy waste into some of the most highly productive soil in the country, famed for the vast quantities of potatoes, vegetables and sugar-beet it produces.

The town owes its origin to the famous Benedictine Abbey which was founded here by Earl Ailwyn in A.D. 969. This later became one of the largest monastic institutions in England and was rebuilt several times, its abbey church being about 400 feet long. In its heyday the abbot exercised almost regal powers and jurisdiction and the abbey library was celebrated for its unique collection of Hebrew books, unfortunately dispersed when the abbey was dissolved in 1539-40, when most of the buildings were destroyed.

Today only the 13th-century Lady Chapel and the porter's lodge with an adjoining fragment of the great 15th-century gatehouse still stand.

The Lady Chapel projected eastwards from the north transept of the abbey church and after the destruction of the rest of the buildings was converted into a house. Traces of tall lancet windows, and its fine buttresses, can still be seen, and inside the basement is a beautiful wall arcade. In 1938 the lease of the Abbey House (as it came to be known) was offered to the Grammar School at a nominal rent, and after certain alterations the school, which was founded in 1656, took up its new quarters there.

What is left of the gatehouse is now the property of the National Trust and is open to the public. Inside the lodge are preserved some of the huge carved bosses from the vaulted roof of the abbey church which were found in the churchyard wall a few years ago. Close by are the earthworks of a small Norman motte-and-bailey castle.

The parish church is of exceptional interest and its peculiar plan indicates that it was probably built as the abbey guesthouse or hospitium, being converted to its present use at a later date. It did not become a parish church until 1875, before which time it was a "donative" of undefined status.

The building is largely of late 12th-century date, but the aisles were rebuilt at the end of the 15th-century. The vaulted chancel is original and a striking feature. There was no tower until 1672 when the present western one was constructed, probably from the abbey ruins. The splendid Norman doorway was, no doubt, originally the west doorway of the guest house and was reset when the tower was built. The church possesses a notable carved wooden lectern of the 15th-century.

There is little of antiquity in the other buildings of the town as several disastrous fires have destroyed what was left of the Middle Ages. One of the most destructive took place in 1731 when the High Street was burnt out. Consequently most of the houses date from the late 18th-century onwards and are typical of the fenland towns. It is interesting to note that the High Street and the Great Whyte were divided into uniform building plots by the abbey when the lines of the town were laid out in the 13th-century and many of the present houses stand on plots which retain their original dimensions.

When the town obtained the grant of a Market in the 13th-century, a market place was laid out between the High Street and the Little Whyte, but this has subsequently been built over, perhaps after the fire of 1731. An annual Fair was also granted, which is now held every year at the end of July.

Formerly the Great Whyte was divided down the middle by an open stream known as the Bury Brook. This was culverted in 1853-54 and today the unusually wide street which was then formed is, next to the abbey and church, the town's most striking feature.

Modern Ramsey is the centre of a busy agricultural district and the Urban District Council has built over 500 Council houses to accommodate the rising population. A new sewerage scheme is in course of construction at an estimated cost of nearly £150,000. The two railway stations have been closed to passenger traffic, but there is a good service of buses to local towns and villages.

St. Ives

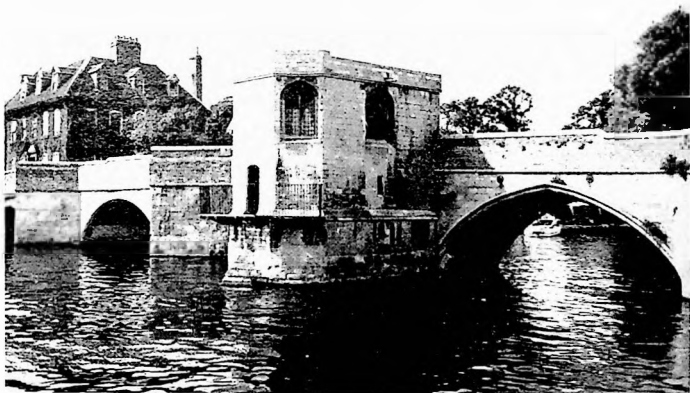
W. G. GREAVES

THE market town of St. Ives is the commercial centre of an important agricultural district. In these quiet unhurried days it is difficult to realise that, once upon a time, the little town was of international importance, and played a large part in the import and export trade of England.

The town can trace its origin back to three separate and notable events in its history, and each has had its special influence. The first was the establishment of a small village, known as Slepe, on the north bank of the Ouse some time in the eighth century. This unusual place-name means "Slippery place" and referred to the muddy low-lying ground near where the settlement was made. The village stood north and west of the present parish church and some of the narrow streets there may go back to that period. The village and manor of Slepe was given to Ramsey Abbey as part of its endowment and that led to the second important event, the foundation of a "cell" or priory, dependent on the abbey, at the beginning of the 11th-century. This priory was dedicated to St. Ivo or Ive, a Persian bishop whose bones were miraculously discovered nearby. The third event was the granting of a yearly fair in 1110 by King Henry I to Ramsey Abbey and "St. Ive of Slepe." It was this, more than anything else, which caused the permanent establishment of the town. A weekly market was also granted at a later date.

Only a few miles away the River Ouse enters the Fens which, before the invention of the steam pump, consisted of meres, bogs and meandering waterways. Barges bringing goods from the Wash ports made their way across the Fens, and the first town they came to which could provide a hard landing stage was St. Ives. There they also found a bridge across the river which made road transport possible in every direction. It is not surprising therefore that merchants came to the fair, not only from many parts of England but from many parts of Europe, and St. Ives took its place beside London and Winchester as one of the three great international fairs of the country. This period of prosperity lasted for about 150 years, but after the interruption caused by the Black Death in the mid-14th-century the trade did not return and the famous Stour-bridge Fair at Cambridge took its place. The reason for the decline of St. Ives is unknown but it is possible that some essential waterway got silted up. Even today the annual fair held in October attracts great crowds and the Bank Holiday Monday markets are an unforgettable scene of bustle and activity.

When the fair was first established there was no town existing. A great open space stretching from the priory as far as the parish church was railed off and within it the fair was held, each trade having its separate location. At first there were no permanent buildings and the stalls were removed when business was over. But with the establishment of the market, permanent shops and houses began to be built round the perimeter and so, eventually, the town came into being. Within a few years the buildings extended on both sides from priory to church though none of



Bridge Chapel, St. Ives

P. G. M. DICKINSON



The Quay, St. Ives

P. G. M. DICKINSON

them is standing now, all having been many times rebuilt. Subsequently the centre part of the Market place was overbuilt, effectively dividing it into two parts one of which is now known as the Waits and the other, the Market Hill.

During the 19th-century and up to 1914 the Cattle Market, which was first established in 1286, was one of the largest in eastern England. Again the geographical position of St. Ives was an important factor. To the east lay the great arable area of the Fens and East Anglia, while to the west were the huge pastures of the Midlands. To the east large numbers of cattle were fed in the yards during the winter, while to the west cattle were fed on the summer grass. Thus the position of St. Ives made it an ideal centre for the transfer of cattle from one area to the other. St. Ives dealers and their agents ranged over the Midlands as far west as Banbury and brought the cattle to St. Ives for sale. The crowds that assembled every Monday were enormous and St. Ives was a sight to see.

The bridge, as we know it today, was built about the year 1400, but two of its arches have been rebuilt. The Chapel of St. Leger which is built upon it is a most unusual feature and should be noted. Permission to view the interior can be obtained from the Borough Surveyor.

Barges are now rarely seen and the river, no longer a commercial highway, provides notable boating and fishing. It makes a delightful setting for the annual regatta and for the elegant craft of the Cambridge University Sailing Club. Broad and steady, it is an ideal river for cabin-cruising holidays. Small boats can be hired, and mooring and watering facilities have been provided. The angling society and the rowing club welcome keen visitors.

The church, which is mainly of 15th-century date, is well worth a visit and is particularly noted for a fine series of carved image brackets. Its graceful spire, which is a landmark for a wide area, has been damaged and rebuilt several times. The last accident happened in 1918 when an aeroplane hit it, knocking two-thirds of it down.

Unfortunately in the year 1680 there was a disastrous fire in the town and it is said that 122 houses were destroyed. As a result there are few houses to be seen of an earlier date. A notable exception is the Manor House near the foot of the bridge which belongs to the late 16th-century. But there are many interesting houses which were built soon after the fire and during the 18th-century, and these add much beauty to the old town.

Oliver Cromwell, who was born and schooled in Huntingdon, lived and farmed in St. Ives for a time. His house was the old Slepe Hall which was demolished in the 19th-century and which stood near the present Cromwell Place. A statue to his memory stands in the Market Place near the Free Church. It is a sincere and rugged representation of a rugged personality, and one feels that the man who would not allow an artist to omit the wart on his nose would have approved of it. The 16th-century brick barn at Green End with its massive buttresses is still standing and is known as Cromwell's Barn. It was used by Oliver Cromwell when he farmed at St. Ives.



The Waits, St. Ives

EAGLE PHOTOS



Houghton Mill

P. G. M. DICKINSON

The Monday Cattle Market and one large coal business remain to remind us of the town's ancient importance as a centre of distribution, but its present prosperity depends upon the growth of a number of light industries. These are very varied and include the first chicory factory to be established in this country. It was started by a Belgian and at first all the key hands were Belgian. Buses bring large numbers of workers to these factories daily from the surrounding villages.

Though the town is small it enjoys much social activity. There is an interesting local museum where exhibits show that there has been a continuous occupation of the town and the surrounding district from the Stone Age to the present day. There are societies interested in music and drama, a book club which is over 200 years old, the Ivy Leaf Club for ex-Service men and good facilities for sports, including golf.

For further information visitors should consult the Borough Guide and the Information Panel on the side of the Bus Shelter near the Market.

St. Ives Rural District

W. G. GREAVES

THERE is evidence that in Roman times, and before, the fen and river valleys of the Rural District were inhabited by peasant farmers and that the rivers were used for transport. No Roman Villas have so far been discovered but, at Colne near the present village, is the site of a fairly large Roman-British settlement of which the banks and ditches may still be seen including the enclosures of small rectangular fields. Pottery of various dates, and pottery kilns, have been discovered from time to time. Of other pre-Norman works there appear to be none. Neither does there seem to have been any castles but moats, usually encircling manor houses or farmsteads, are fairly common. There is an interesting one at Broughton marking the site of the manor of the Abbot of Ramsey and others are at Colne, Fenstanton (The Grove), at both Hemingfords, Hilton, Somersham (site of the Bishop of Ely's palace), Warboys and Woodhurst.

By far the most important earthwork is that known as the "Bulwark" at Earith, a large rectangular fort with gun emplacements at the corners, probably built by the Parliamentary forces during the Civil Wars, to stop the passage of Royalists from the Midlands to East Anglia. Earith was, during the later Middle Ages, a small river port and had an annual fair which flourished until within living memory. Most of the houses on the riverside belonged to merchants who traded in water-borne goods—wood, coal, stone &c.—An old-established firm of timber merchants still operates in the village and has expanded so that today its activities cover most of the eastern parts of England. It may be of interest to note that timber used to be imported here from Russia, but this trade ceased in 1939.

Practically every one of the seventeen villages which go to form the Rural District has something of interest to show the visitor. Most of them contain beautiful old houses, each with a character of its own. The

riverside villages are most charming and attractive and many are noted for boating. Holywell is so named from a spring (or 'well' in Anglo-Saxon), which rises in the churchyard. Probably in pre-Christian times this well acquired magical properties and became the centre of some heathen cult. When Christianity was established the well was 'converted,' becoming a holy-well. Houghton has a picturesque 17th-century water-mill, now a Youth hostel, and in the village square is a bust of Potto Brown the "Village Philanthropist." Both the Hemingsfords have beautiful churches on the river bank and at Hemingsford Grey is a sturdy Norman manor house, probably the oldest inhabited house in England. It, too, stands near the river and has the remains of a large moat which once encircled it. The upper floor, which originally formed the living quarters, was entered by a Norman doorway approached by an external flight of stairs, destroyed in the 19th-century. Some of the original windows remain and, rarer still, there is an almost perfect Norman fireplace which once heated the main hall.

Hilton is one of the most delightful villages of the Rural District and has an extensive Green surrounded by pleasant houses. Its chief claim to fame is the earth-cut maze at one end of the Green—a perfect example of what was once a fairly common feature of the English countryside, but is now very rare. The only other one in this part of the world is at Saffron Walden. It has an inscribed pillar in the centre recording its re-cutting in 1660. Hanging on a wall in the street of Needingworth (a hamlet of Holywell) are the old Fire Hooks which were used to pull burning thatch off house roofs. Nearby is the cramped and confined lock-up complete with grated door and tiny seat. There is a finer lock-up, of the 17th-century at Fen Stanton, now doing duty as a clock tower. Somersham and Warboys are both large villages, but each with its particular fenland flavour. Wistow is a quiet sort of place hidden in a secluded valley near Ramsey, whereas Oldhurst, Woodhurst and Pidley are perched on top of of the highland at the back of St. Ives. Woodhurst is of particular interest as it is a typical example of a "Ring" village originating in woodland country, though all the woods have long since disappeared.

The parish churches which grace these villages are full of architectural and historical interest, each church having something special which the others lack. Bluntisham has a most unusual 14th-century three-sided apse terminating the chancel while the tower and spire are noteworthy. Bury is Norman, but of a very French type. Traces of a large chapel over a crypt can be seen attached to the western face of the tower. The lectern, like that at Ramsey, is medieval. Wistow has a good late 15th-century nave, some notable screens and painted glass. In the south wall of the chancel may be seen a fine example of a low-side window, often but erroneously called 'leper windows.' Fenstanton, apart from its tall spire which is visible for miles around, has an exceptionally spacious 14th-century chancel in which is the tomb of Lancelot Brown, famous as "Capability" Brown, the landscape gardener. Somersham and Warboys are both large churches, the former being principally 13th-century and the latter having a typical carved Norman chancel arch. Oldhurst, like Woodhurst, has always been a chapelry of St. Ives and is a small but complete building of

the late 13th-century, preserving a Norman pillar piscina from its predecessor.

From an agricultural point of view the Rural District can be divided into three parts. In the Fen and on the heavy clay land, arable farming is usual. Dairy farmers make good use of the lush 'washes' bordering the Ouse, while the area around Earith, Bluntisham and Colne is an important part of the Huntingdonshire-Cambridgeshire orchard country. It is claimed that the best Victoria plums in the world grow here. On Houghton Hill the Animal Health Trust has established an important station for poultry research.

St. Neots

C. F. TEBBUTT, F.S.A.

THE Urban District of St. Neots was formed last century by the amalgamation of the two parishes of St. Neots and Eynesbury.

Opposite the ancient village of Eynesbury was founded on the further side of Hen Brook in the 10th century the monastery dedicated to the Cornish Saint Neot. Little is known of this Saxon monastery except that it suffered in the Danish wars and barely survived until the Conquest. After the Conquest it was further endowed and given by the Norman family of de Clare to the Abbey of Bec in Normandy. It thus came under the control of the dynamic Abbot Anselm, who filled it with monks trained in the foremost seat of learning and culture in Northern Europe. For nearly 400 years as an alien priory of Bec, it influenced the growth, development and trade of a small community of merchants and tradesmen that grew up around it.

The bridge, formerly of wood, carrying an important medieval highway; the market square, one of the largest in the country, and the planned town with its wide main street can all be attributed to the enlightened foresight of the monks from the parent abbey.

The great cathedral-like 15th-century church, justly famous and quite outstanding in its beauty, was perhaps their last and greatest gift to the town. Of the priory itself, built on the river bank north of the Market Square, some few remains have been found and the bases of the pillars which supported the dormitory undercroft may be seen in a private garden. The site is at present being excavated. By tradition the stone bridge, built about 1580-1600, was constructed from its ruins.

The medieval town grew and prospered on trade based on the navigation of the Ouse even before locks were built in the early 17th-century. In Georgian times, prosperous merchants lived in the town, whose houses with yards and warehouses running back to Hen Brook still give a pleasing character to the north side of the Market Square.

Today St. Neots is a comfortable, small but progressive market town where on its Thursday market day the Market Place, large though it be, is tightly packed with stalls, and the cars and buses bring country people from a ten-mile radius to do their weekly shopping and business.

The flourishing industries of milling, brewing, paper making, engineering and timber processing were all originally based on the river navigation but have survived its disuse. To these have been added in recent years light industries connected with plastics, clothing, footwear and electricity distribution.

Serving both agriculture and industry is the Huntingdonshire Technical Institute situated in the town. A new Secondary Modern School was opened in 1960 and a Grammar School is planned for the near future.

An annual Carnival held regularly since 1947 during the last week of August has raised considerable funds to provide a public hall and swimming pool.

In the past, building land in the neighbourhood of the town has been difficult to obtain, but now enough has been acquired to provide both for housing and industry for some time to come.

To most visitors the River Ouse, which forms the western boundary of the town, is its greatest attraction. On each side it flows almost completely unspoiled along a lush valley of meadows, osier beds, and spinneys. Encouraged by the repair and opening of all locks below the town to the sea a flourishing River Club has been formed whose members enjoy cruising holidays along hundreds of miles of navigable inland waters. An enthusiastic sailing section has recently been formed by the club, and annual river festivals are held during August.

The St. Neots Rowing Club, a much older institution, holds an annual regatta of high standard usually on the first Saturday in August, while the ever increasingly popular sport of fishing brings visitors from as far as London and the West Midlands.

Recreation in St. Neots is not confined to river sports. There is a good nine-hole golf course on the Kimbolton Road; football and cricket are both popular. Tennis and bowls each have their following and (as on the golf course) visitors are welcome and visitors' fees very reasonable. Cycling has been a keen local interest for many years.

There are four A.A. listed Hotels, main line railway communication with King's Cross, and frequent bus services to Cambridge, Bedford and Huntingdon.

St. Neots Rural District

C. F. TEBBUTT, F.S.A.

THE Rural District of St. Neots is well wooded and has the Ouse valley running through it from south to north. From the top of Great Paxton Hill, the finest viewpoint in the county, the prospect westward is of almost forest country as far as the Northamptonshire border.

Of the many interesting villages in the Rural District, perhaps Kimbolton, once a market town in miniature, is the most important. It retains its medieval town plan almost unaltered and at one end of the picturesque Market Place is the imposing gatehouse to Kimbolton

Castle. Of the medieval castle where the unhappy Katharine of Aragon died during her imprisonment, nothing remains. The present structure, the ancestral home of the Dukes of Manchester, which may not stand on the old site, was erected to the designs of Sir John Vanbrugh in the early 18th-century and is one of the best examples of his work. The building is now occupied by Kimbolton School, a direct-grant institution founded in 1600 and containing about 450 boys. It is usually open to visitors during the school holidays. The earlier school buildings stand at the other end of the village on the Higham Ferrers road.

Kimbolton takes its name from the Kim Brook which changes its name three times during its course to the river Ouse. At Tilbrook it is the Til, at Kimbolton the Kim and at Hail Weston the Haile. It flows by Great Staughton, once the home of Oliver Cromwell's brother-in-law, Valentine Wanton and here is an interesting Manor House and a large church containing several fine monuments. In 1958 a 4th-century Roman villa with mosaic floor was excavated near Rushey Farm by the Ministry of Works.

Buckden is an old coaching village on the Great North Road and in the centre are two notable inns almost facing each other—the George of the 18th-century with traditions of Dick Turpin and the Lion of the 15th-century, perhaps originally a guest house of the Bishop's Palace—it has some good carved beams inside. Nearby is the former palace of the Bishops of Lincoln, the principal remains being part of the precinct wall, the large inner gatehouse and the tall keep-like brick tower. It was from close confinement here that Queen Katharine was taken to Kimbolton. Some few years ago it was acquired by a Roman Catholic religious order and the ruined tower has now been restored and brought into use again, and a very modernistic church built.

Great Paxton, on the other side of the Ouse has one of the most intriguing and puzzling churches in this part of England. The unique aisled nave and some remains of a crossing are all that is left of a cruciform Saxon 'minster' church which was drastically remodelled in the 14th and 15th-centuries when a new western tower was built and the transepts destroyed. Two other churches in the vicinity deserve mention—Little Paxton, which has a carved Norman doorway, and Southoe which has another one.

In the extreme south of the district is Great Gransden with a wealth of well kept thatched cottages. From the tower, the church chimes, dating from the 17th-century, play ancient hymn tunes to mark the hours. Among Great Gransden's vicars was Barnabus Oley who suffered much for his loyalty to the Stuarts during the Civil War. He was instrumental in outwitting Cromwell himself when, under his guidance, a convoy of treasure being sent from Cambridge to the King at Oxford eluded the Parliamentary forces. Next to the church is the 17th-century Rippington Manor, while a short distance away is a wooden post windmill preserved by the County Council and open to visitors. In the reconstructed mill-house Queen Marie of Yugo-Slavia lived during the Second World War.

Camping and caravan parking facilities are available at Offord Mill and boats may be hired there.

St. Neots Rural District Council is a progressive body which has striven to improve the amenities of the people within its boundaries. Every village and hamlet, and a great many isolated farms, have been given a piped water supply. Sewage schemes for the larger villages are either in course of accomplishment or awaiting government sanction. Since the end of the war 339 Council houses have been built, bringing up the total owned by the Council to 523.



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PART III Industry and Craft

HUNTINGDON—OPPORTUNITY FOR INDUSTRY

By the Borough Estates Officer

EXPANSION spells opportunity and this is available in Huntingdon where planned expansion will make it a town of the future. Its expansion will not detract from its rural setting on the banks of the River Ouse with good road and rail communications. London with its docks is only sixty-two miles away, and neighbouring towns are Cambridge sixteen miles, Peterborough eighteen miles, Bedford twenty miles, Kettering twenty-six miles and Northampton thirty-seven miles. The Ermine Street (A14) passes through the town and connects to the Great North Road three miles away. In addition an excellent network of radial roads extends in all directions giving routes to the neighbouring towns and beyond, while the main line railway from London to Scotland via York and Newcastle serves the town. Huntingdon has therefore much to offer as a site for industrial development. Existing industries already operating include vegetable canning, electronics and electrical engineering, rubber moulding, confectionery and light engineering.

The Borough Council has acquired suitable land with all main services adjoining the main line railway and with ready access to the Great North Road and Ermine Street as industrial sites for immediate development. These sites can be leased or purchased. Additional sites will be made available as expansion proceeds.

In conjunction with the London County Council the Borough Council is undertaking an extensive housing scheme to proceed with Industrial Development to ensure an adequate labour supply. Sites will also be reserved for shops, offices and private residential development. Work-people mainly from London will be offered new modern houses in pleasant surroundings at reasonable rents. A population increase of 3,500 is anticipated as a result of this development. Additional schools will be provided as development proceeds and already there are ample shopping and recreational facilities. The Borough Council will offer every assistance to industrialists wishing to establish factories in the town.

AGRICULTURE

Abridged from a report by the County Land Agent

Huntingdonshire is principally a county of small farms and small-holdings with the larger farms on the uplands and the smaller on the fens as is shown by the fact that there are only seven farms of 1,000 or more and 1,350 of up to 50 acres in area.

In spite of a dry climate, the biggest single attribute to economic farming has been the improved drainage over the whole county standing as it does on a subsoil of Oxford and Boulder clays, with gravel in the valleys of the River Ouse and Nene. The soil varies from the heavy

clay in the west to the alluvial deposits in the valleys and peat in the east. On the heavy clay soil covering over one half of the county the old system of permanent pasture and summer fallows has given way to the more intensified growing of cereals and short leys, made possible by mechanisation and improved equipment enabling farmers to carry out earlier cultivations. In spite of the preponderance of root crops in the fens the largest acreage of land in the county, 47,000 acres, is devoted to the growing of wheat, an acreage increase of 25 per cent on pre-war returns, and it is surprising to find that the growing of barley on the uplands has more than doubled in the same period.

The cattle population remains constant, with sheep decreasing where grassland is ploughed up, but there are indications that sheep are gaining popularity in the north-west of the county. Milk is principally produced from Friesian and Shorthorn herds for local needs and a large collection and distribution centre has been established at Fenstanton.

Along the valley of the Ouse from St. Neots to St. Ives and the county's eastern boundary land liable to flooding is used extensively for grazing and the summer fattening of stock, but above flood level the alluvial soil is very productive, growing cereals, potatoes, sugar beet, peas and an increasing acreage of brussels sprouts.

In the Somersham, Colne, Bluntisham district in the south-east the loamy gravel soil is most suitable for the growing of hard and soft fruits, particularly plums and strawberries which find markets in the Midlands and London and locally for canning and preserving. In this area the fruit growing is associated with pig production. The keeping of poultry on the deep litter system is popular in this area and in the Hemingsfords the production of "Broiler" fowls on a large commercial basis is in operation.

The fenlands occupy one-third of the area of the county, in the north-east centred around Farcet, Ramsey and Warboys. Here the clay is covered with peat in places to a considerable depth to give black easy-working soil of very high fertility where for drainage purposes the fields are small and divided by dykes and drains. Drainage is all important in this area and as a result it is divided into Internal Drainage Districts each responsible for an elaborate system of main drains to feed modern pumping stations which lift the water into drains at a higher level which in turn eventually discharge or are pumped into the tidal Ouse.

The cost of this drainage falls on the land in the area and represents a charge in the region of 30/- per acre. However, with a controlled water table, the latent fertility of the peat and the increasing use of artificial manures, this area is the principal root-growing district in the county, specialising in the growing of sugar beet and potatoes. Of the 12,700 acres of sugar beet grown in the county most is grown on the fens, with a slightly higher acreage for the growing of potatoes. Wheat, carrots, celery, onions and chicory are crops used to maintain a rotation. The sugar beet is processed by factories at Peterborough and Ely and the chicory at St. Ives. Potatoes are transported for consumption to every part of Great Britain and in Ramsey one enterprise prepares and packs them ready for cooking, a boon to the housewife. Virtually the only livestock kept on the fens is pigs for which by-product feeding is available;

some stock, however, is yarded in winter for the conversion of wheat straw into manure. As might be expected the fenland area is eminently suitable for smallholdings and the county is well equipped with statutory smallholdings provided by the County Council, on an estate of 10,600 acres, affording a livelihood either full-time or part-time to 500 tenants.

A regular labour force of 4,500 agricultural workers is employed in the county, supplemented by casual workers organised into gangs operating in peak periods under a "Gang Master" in the cultivation of sugar beet and carrots and the harvesting of all root crops and brussels sprouts.

The increasing popularity of the mushroom in the British kitchen has brought regular employment and profit to those engaged in this comparatively new activity. Although the general idea to the uninitiated is that the grower sets the spawn and sits back to await vast crops, the actual truth is that after a crop has been gathered, fumigation of the growing area is a very necessary process and only thorough cleansing will ensure continued production. Constant vigilance and hard work are necessary to success.

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In Huntingdon itself they are responsible for the re-development of part of the town centre. Here a pedestrian shopping precinct and square are now well underway. Eventually the scheme will provide approx. 35 shops of widely varying size and type, including Supermarket, Chain Store, Fashion Stores, etc. Office accommodation and Residential quarters. A multi-storey Car park is also planned together with a multi-storey block.

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HUNTINGDONSHIRE COUNTY HANDBOOK

Individual Enterprises

AGRICULTURAL SUPPLIES

Herbert Larratt & Co. Ltd., have supplied farms throughout the fen country since the latter half of the last century. Originally the business was concerned principally with the grinding of the farmers' own corn and the delivery of Millers Offals. Since it was taken over by its present owners in 1916 the business has been steadily enlarged and further mills have been acquired and fitted with modern machinery to meet the present day demands of progressive farming.

The firm now supplies animal feeding stuffs, seed corn, fertilizers, and agricultural chemicals and has mills at Ramsey, Chatteris, Whittlesey and Somersham.

HIGH FIDELITY EQUIPMENT

Huntingdon has been brought to the forefront in the field of high fidelity by the Accoustical Manufacturing Co. Ltd., who moved there from London in 1941. Four years ago this firm developed and manufactured, in Huntingdon the first wide range electrostatic loudspeaker in the world.

The firm's export markets cover the whole of Europe, The United States of America, all the independent Commonwealth countries and to a smaller extent South America and the Far East, and the 'QUAD' range of high quality amplifiers, loudspeakers and radio tuners is recognised throughout the world.

RUBBER

Silent Channel Co. Ltd., with its subsidiary, The Huntingdon Rubber Co. Ltd., are the largest employers of labour in Huntingdon. The parent company came to the ancient borough over twenty-five years ago. During that time they have contributed a great deal to Huntingdon and Godmanchester in terms of both industrial prosperity and social co-operation. Silent Channel are important suppliers to the Motor Industry, making Channel (including Flocked Channel), Weatherstrip and Door Seal as well as Rubber Components, Sponge and Extrusions for many trades. They work in all grades of natural and synthetic rubbers.

Since the company first came to Huntingdon from London they have expanded considerably and have built two more factories and extensions. One handles the work of the subsidiary and a recent extension includes the most modern mixing and weighing plant for rubber compounding. The other produces metal pressings and plating work. In addition to the three factories, there is a comprehensive research and testing laboratory. A modern drawing office and well equipped toolroom enable plant and tooling to be designed and maintained at a high standard.

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The company has over 100 vehicles equipped for the delivery of its products which include ready mixed concrete. Keeping in step with the increasing use of concrete for building the firm is now able to supply pre-stressed concrete beams, reinforced beams and piles, precision concrete bricks, concrete building blocks, concrete pipes, hydraulically-pressed kerbs and slabs and concrete frame buildings.

The reserves of gravel bearing land held by the company are constantly being increased. This together with further expansion in the manufacture of pre-stressed concrete will ensure that **St. Ives Sand & Gravel Co. Ltd.**, is well prepared for the increased demand for their products that will result from the country's programme for road, water and sewerage improvements.

BUILDING

The family business of **F. B. Thackray & Co. Ltd.**, began in Godmanchester in 1832, moving to Huntingdon in 1869. Recent contracts carried out by the firm include the building of Godmanchester County Primary School and an old people's home, 'Hunters Down' at Hartford. At present it is engaged in erecting 100 houses for the London County Council, a Secondary Modern School at Sawtry and factories at Huntingdon.

K. B. Benfield & Co. Ltd., another local firm of builders and public works contractors came to Huntingdonshire in February, 1958 when they were successful in obtaining the Sewerage Scheme Contract for Ramsey U.D.C. Since then their interests and activities have progressed not only through all types of contract work, but also in the field of new housing. The current aim is for a turnover of 100 houses per year in East Anglia, and projects are at present underway in March (2 sites), Ramsey (2 sites), and Great Stukeley. Each development provides houses, bungalows and shops. A wide price range caters for most tastes and pockets. All houses are certified by the National House Builders Registration Council, and carry a two year guarantee. The firm is always seeking land for development and hopes to announce new projects shortly.

In Huntingdon itself it is responsible for the re-development of part of the town centre. Here a pedestrian shopping precinct and square are now well underway. Eventually the scheme will provide about 35 shops of widely varying size and type, including supermarket, chain store, fashion stores etc., office accommodation and residential quarters. A multi-storey car park is also planned together with a multi-storey block.

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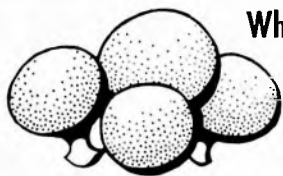
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